

Interference

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Author's Note: *This story is set in early 3963 B.B.Y., a few weeks after the surprise attack by the Mandalorians on the Republic. It takes place between Volumes 4 and 5 of Dark Horse's Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic series*

Attention Mandalorians! Stay tuned to this frequency for an announcement of vital importance!

* * *

Attention Mandalorians!! This is your friend from the Republic, *Captain Goodvalor* calling!

I'm busy shaking down my new warship, the *Serroco*, but my colleagues at the Admiralty have asked me to make an appeal to the forces fighting for Mandalore. I'm speaking on a frequency your helmet transceivers can pick up. It's a trick we learned from your fellow warriors who have already seen the light and crossed the lines to defend the Republic!

You've had a lucky little run -- though not a surprising one, following the sucker punches you've thrown. But the easy times are over, let me tell you!

In fact, I *will* tell you. Make sure you and all your Basic-speaking friends are listening for my next broadcast -- your lives may depend on it!

* * *

Su'cuy, warriors! Conquest of the south polar area of the planet is nearly complete. Attend to your rally masters for further instructions.

Some of you have reported hearing increased gabble on the Neo helmet's Z-band. Just ignore it.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Captain Goodvalor calling again, as promised.

You survived long enough to hear me -- good! Not all of you were so lucky, or so I hear. Your forces tried hard, they did -- but the Taris Resistance got away to fight another day. And fight they will. Because while they may not have been in the Republic long, they've got what it takes, where it counts.

They do. We do. But what about *you*?

That's right: We've been taking your measure in these first weeks since you barged into Republic territory -- just as you were taking ours with your little provocations before that. The difference is, we're able to do something about it.

It's all about the numbers, my friends. There are more of us than there are of you -- and we don't have to build shipyards and armories on the fly. We've already got them. How long do you really think it takes to refit a landspeeder factory to produce armored attack craft? And how many landspeeder factories do you imagine there are in the whole Galactic Republic, hmm?

You won't have to imagine for long. You'll be seeing what we can do up close and personal soon enough.

This is Goodvalor, signing off. Cue the slogan, Lieutenant.

The Republic. Here today, here tomorrow.

* * *

Ke'sush, warriors! This is Sornell, again, with the Taris signal post.

Yes, you do have to stay on the Z-band. The heavies are still coming in. You want to be standing in the wrong place when the bombs drop, it's fine by me.

Just stay focused.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Goodvalor, again. While you're waiting for the end to come -- and brother, is it on its way! -- I thought we'd have a talk about you. You know, the *Mando'ade* -- the "sons and daughters of Mandalore." That sounds nice, but I hate to break it to most of you: *You're adopted.*

They've told us many of you were once upstanding, peace-loving residents of worlds invaded by Mandalore and his thug, Cassus Fett. And that many of you were lured, by threat or trickery, into donning armor and joining his mad cause! But do you really know what that cause is? Do you know what you're fighting for? It's *ego*. Bruised ego is all it is -- not worth putting your skin (or scales, or whatever) on the line for.

Let old Goodvalor fill you in: A generation ago, in the Great Sith War, the Mandalorian clans were made to serve a single rogue Jedi, after he defeated your leader in combat. And to this day, nobody in metal shoulder pads has been able to get over it. So now, the current Mandalore -- the name your current scoundrel gave *himself*, how's that for cheek? -- is throwing your lives away in a galactic war. Just to repair -- what? His bruised ego, buddy! With *your* neck!

I know -- it's not the kind of thing they tell you about in armor class. Maybe there's a reason for that. Think about it: It only took one Jedi to humiliate you before -- and we've got a lot more where that came from! True, the Jedi Order remains *officially* neutral. But perhaps you've heard of The Revanchist -- a Jedi who's lobbying to change that even as I speak! That sound you hear is lightsabers igniting?

Things look good to you today, pillaging dress shops and fruit stands on rimworlds like Taris and Suurja. But the tide is turning. Which side will *you* be on? All you have to do is drop the helmet and walk away. Or better yet -- return to the service of the Republic that has given you so much!

Only the gloom of the grave awaits Mandalore. Don't join him. Join *us*!

The Republic. No gloom. Just glory.

* * *

Sornell here. We need to know what utreekov parked the Davaab fighter on top of the -- what is this? The Highport Banking Tower. We need the space for the new receiver platform.

Get up here and get your ship before we push it over the side.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! This is Commander True, first officer to Captain Goodvalor.

The captain apologizes, but he is not going to be able to broadcast today. There were so many Mandalorians who crossed the lines and joined the Republic after his last message, he's just been too busy.

He sends his regards.

The Republic. It sends its regards.

* * *

Signal post. Okay, now, we've just seen it. I don't care what Jettiise nonsense is in the air, you can't go around switching off your transceivers!

We absolutely made a call -- what was it, Gorrga, ten seconds? Ten seconds after we shoved the fighter over the side of the building. There was plenty of time, if you were listening. You guys in the Lower City need to stay on top of things.

Oh, and -- ah, "we'll remember them, so they are eternal."

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! It's your captain speaking -- you know the one. I'm just sitting down to a delicious dish of Bilovi Tempari, here in my beautifully appointed climate-controlled ship's lounge. And that was when -- no, sweetheart, no more wine, thanks -- I got to thinking about *you*.

You, you valiant, daring creatures -- toughing it out there in the field for Old Rustface. Tell me, how's life?

Don't answer that -- I think I know! Those friends of yours I've told you about have described the vile conditions you're forced to endure. "Nomadic lifestyle," indeed. No style to *that* life, brothers and sisters -- slogging through one Outer Rim mudhole after another for weeks at a time. Tell the truth: How often do you get to clean that armor? I mean -- *inside*, where it counts? No wonder you like your camps spread out!

Sorry to go on about this, but, really, your ex-comrades-in-arms can't quit talking about how much better it is over here. Actually, a few of our recent arrivals will be over a little later. They're dropping by for drinks after the floor show. Come to think of it, I need to find out if they're bringing their dates -- we'll need to set up some more chairs by the pool.

The Republic. Real beds. Running water.

* * *

Su'cuy, Cassus Fett, and all honor to your family's dead. Sornell here, at the listening post.

Yes, we've all been hearing it.

No, I don't know what "Bivoli Tempari" is. We're asking around.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Let me tell you about my day -- it's been an exciting one. This is Captain Goodvalor, of course -- but today, I am an Okyaabi!

Today, I stood with the proud people of Okyaab 6 as they threw off the shackles of their Mandalorian slavers and rose to join the Republic. A small frontier system, to be sure -- but proof of the pettiness of Mandalore, as no peaceful farming community, no collection of artisans is too small to merit one of his cowardly attacks. But after less than a week under the illegitimate rule of the costume fetishist Mandalore and his cronies, the Okyaabi have retaken their world.

They're free, my Mandalorian friends -- free to participate in Republic commerce again and enjoy the prosperity so many of us have come to know. Free to go where they wish and live where they choose, without being driven ever onward in some futile quest for someone else's revenge. Free to be the kind of people *you* can be. If, that is, you choose to avoid the fate of the Mandalorian forces that once enslaved Okyaab. I'd put one of their survivors on the air to speak with you -- but blast it, we just haven't been able to find any...

The Republic. Freedom now, freedom forever!

* * *

This is Sornell, for the team at SoroSuub Landing, or whatever they call it. See if you can get that big viewscreen down without totally trashing the electronics. I'd like to have just one piece of equipment this trip I don't have to build myself, for a change.

And, no, I've never heard of a planet named Okyaab. Does it have to do with getting me the parts I asked for? Because I know none of you wants to waste my time.

And for you new recruits: "Cui ogir'olar" is Mando'a for "it's irrelevant." Or, in my clan, "You will bleed a lot if you ask again." So don't say you didn't know.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Goodvalor calling. They tell me you Mandalorians are a superstitious lot. (Like you couldn't tell from the weird stuff you carry around. And so much of it! Haven't you people ever heard of apartments? Houses? Storage units?)

Anyway, this may interest you. We've learned from our many informants in your ranks that a batch of your forces in the Taris system is angling for Zongorlu next. What you may not know is that those weren't all military camps on Serroco that Mandalore so callously and criminally nuked. There were vacation camps for Zongorlu younglings -- nine camps, representing every major warrior-tribe on the planet!

Since then, we haven't seen people from Zongorlu out and about in the Republic much. They've become stay-at-home types -- and, well, they're more than a little touchy. Even their Senator just asked for a leave of absence -- and a heavy assault cannon.

I don't think I'd come to Zongorlu if I were you.

The Republic. Just looking out for you.

* * *

Sornell here. Everybody forming up in the camp up here, the signal station is not the place to bring your questions about alien biology. If you really want to know what a Zongorlu looks like, you can wait until we get there.

I don't care if you just joined us. Next guy who bothers me gets beaten to death.

* * *

Captain Goodvalor will return shortly. In the meantime, this Republic weather report for Zongorlu:

Hurricane-force winds across much of the planet, with magnetic storms throughout the ionosphere. Searing heat at the surface, with intermittent pyroclastic flows from some of the larger volcanic ranges. Atmospheric sulfur content remains high, with acidic rains in the polar regions.

Essentially, for Zongorlu, a temperate day.

* * *

We'll need another couple of days on the mobile signal station, Cassus. We were able to scrounge most of the equipment from the shops here on Taris, but we're pretty sure on Zongorlu we'll need some kind of heavy-duty shielding for the transmitter. We're forging something now. I'll shout when we're ready.

No, we're still getting the broadcasts -- and yeah, they're a problem. Not for the real Mando'ade -- "kaysh mirsh'kyramud" is all you hear from them. They couldn't care less. But I don't know about some of these guys that put on a Neo-Crusader helmet five minutes ago to join the fun.

They're always asking why we don't jam the Republic broadcasts, like we did when we were landing. I tell them that a siege is one thing -- then, an attack on an enemy comm system is like an attack on an enemy army -- but an occupation is something else. Jamming serves no purpose now. We're wrapping up anybody the Republic might want to talk to here -- and as for ourselves, no warrior worth the name ought to pay it any mind. That's what they ought to do, but...

... well, let me tell you. My cousin's a rally master running a bunch of these newbies as a demo team, clearing out the Undercity. Yesterday they were supposed to be minding the detonators when another one of these stupid broadcasts came on, and some mindless di'kut got preoccupied and brought a city block down on top of everyone, my cousin and all.

Thanks -- but no. Actually, we never thought that much of him.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Captain Goodvalor here -- pardon me for being out of breath. I was just taking another walk around the decks of the *Serroco*, and I'm winded. I haven't had that much exercise since training at the Academy.

I haven't spoken much about my fine ship, have I? For shame -- I'm such a terrible host. Well, some of you may have seen some of our larger vessels, valiantly defending and delaying your forces at places with names such as Vanquo, Tarnith, and -- yes -- *Serroco*. Well, they'd all fit nicely into the landing bay of this beauty. With room to spare!

Only we don't spare much room, because we need it. Yes, every bit of space (not devoted to the many entertainments I've mentioned previously) is currently committed to housing troops for landing; their munitions; and our own more-than-healthy complement of precision guided missiles. Those Republic naval designers don't skimp on anything! And if you Mandies think you know armor, you should take a look at our shielding! Why, I'll bet there were a few less asteroids in the Deep Core once they got done with this miracle!

And this fleet! I know this is audio, but let me paint the picture for you. Right now, I'm looking out my window at a sky so thick with ships, you could walk from here to the next system. Hammerhead cruisers! *Conductor*-class transports! Military droid carriers! I've never seen so many in one place. It's like an old Academy reunion -- only it's no party. No, everyone here has a very important mission. A very important, very *secret* mission.

So many ships! So many troops! I'm not sure if Zongorlu has nearly enough space for all of us.

Oops! I gave something away, there, didn't I?

The Republic. Just imagine what we can do.

* * *

Sornell here. Everybody on this duty, hurry up and get this junk loaded. The planet's not going to invade itself.

* * *

Attention, all Republic civilian vessels in the Zongorlu system! This is Captain Goodvalor of the *Serroco*, advising you to depart the area.

It isn't that we cannot guarantee your safety against the Mandalorians -- we're here to protect the entire system, after all. But with so many warships here, now, traffic in the area is a bit congested.

Come back next week -- once we get all the armored bodies carted away, Zongorlu should be open for business again.

* * *

This is Sornell, aboard Shaadlar troopship Nehutyc. Inform Cassus Fett that we're well underway.

No word from up ahead on Zongorlu yet. We haven't been able to confirm much of anything -- we can't even find anyone who's ever seen a ship like this "Serroco," not even any of the Republic guys who came over. But whatever's there, we're ready for it.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Captain Goodvalor, and... pardon my yawn. Yes, I'm up late. Always hard to sleep the night before the battle, isn't it? It's night where we are, on guard, orbiting above the largest citadel on Zongorlu. But for our visitors soon to arrive, the night will never end. And that's why I wanted to speak to you: not as enemy captain to enemy footsoldier, but as one sentient being to another.

There's still time to change your minds, to change your paths. To take control of your transport ships -- and your lives, and in so doing, save them.

Whatever strategic importance you may have been told Zongorlu has in some wider scheme of Mandalore's -- consider the cost. I've told you what's waiting for you, here. That's all I can do.

No snappy slogan tonight. This is Captain Goodvalor, signing off.

* * *

This is it -- Zongorlu, dead ahead. Will call when the signal station is in place. Happy hunting.

Oya!

* * *

This is Koblus Sornell on Zongorlu. Give me Cassus.

Well, have him contact me, right away.

This is ... strange.

* * *

Cassus, the signal post is operational. Your marshal's still in the field, but I can give you the view from here.

First, the planet. Those reports we were getting were full of gas. The planet's decent enough -- good weather, no problem getting down at all. And the shock troops were a waste. The Zongorlu are a plant species. They're sentient, all right, but they're big and lumpy and they move about a meter a day. They kind of blinked when we landed. I don't think they had camps of younglings on Serroco -- unless they had them out in the garden somewhere!

And the fleet amounted to even less. There were a couple of abandoned ships floating around in orbit -- Mandalore the Indomitable might have seen them when he went past a generation ago, from the looks of them.

But the most dini'la, the most insane, the most crazy thing is right where I'm at. I'm talking to you from a transmission station, all right -- but it's not the one we brought. From the logs, as best as I can tell -- this was where that guy was talking to us from. Captain Goodhaven, or whatever his name is!

They've got a directional transmitter here, which we're guessing they were using to target points on the Outer Rim. All the time this so-called "Captain" was talking about his big ship, he's been sitting in a little room you couldn't fit a basilisk in, gnawing on dried dreeka fish and running his mouth!

No, he's not here -- it looks like he dropped everything when we came out of hyperspace. The trackers have found marks where a little ship took off.

Like I said, strange. But a good lesson for the new guys. This is the way a Mandalorian jams a broadcast -- we take out the source!

Sornell out.

* * *

Sornell, to the camp -- Cassus tells us we need to hold station for a week or so. This operation was supposed to take a lot longer.

Haili cetare! Have a drink, enjoy the weather.

* * *

Sornell, to the camp. Look, Cassus will call us when it's our turn to move again. He's got some other things going on.

And if you've got to entertain yourselves, don't set fire to the Zongorlu. It hasn't rained all week. The whole camp could go up.

* * *

Warriors, there's no use being on the Z-band at all. There's no bombing traffic to worry about, and that Republic fraud won't be there, either.

Every day can't be a battle -- I think someone said that once. Find something to do, or I'll find something for you to do.

* * *

Status report from Zongorlu. It's quiet, here.

Very quiet.

I can't believe we're actually missing that stupid thing.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! Stay tuned to this frequency for an announcement of vital importance!

* * *

Haar'chak! Haar'chak! Haar'chak!

I take it back.

* * *

Attention Mandalorians! This is Captain Goodvalor speaking!

Yes, as you've seen, our forces were called away unexpectedly from Zongorlu -- and I, myself, was summoned to Coruscant for an important session with the Admiralty and representatives of the Senate! And as part of our long-standing commitment to the environment, my forces made sure to leave Zongorlu looking even more peaceful than it did when we arrived. We hope you'll do the same.

Now, I'm signaling to you from a position further in Republic space with a message that we hope you'll find of interest. It is, in fact, the very reason I was recalled -- as the Republic's representative to the Mandalorians these last weeks, I'm sure you'll recognize my offer as an official one.

And it is an offer. They say that Mandalorians deal with things in a Mandalorian way. Well, the same is true of the Republic. And what is the Republic at heart, if not first and foremost, a vehicle for the enrichment of all peoples? There isn't any reason at all why the forces of Mandalore can't have a seat at the table like anyone else.

And so the offer is this: The Republic would welcome a cessation of hostilities with the *Mando'ade*. In return, the Senate would be willing to commit a share of all taxation from Republic planets and hyperspace lanes currently under Mandalorian occupation to go to the occupiers. That's right: the spoils of war, to stop the war.

It is a fair price, and one that should more than satisfy all your requirements. With your victories in these weeks, your honor has been restored. The galaxy knows it. The Jedi did nothing to stop you; they know it. And you will have the prize -- part of the wealth of these stars, without having to continue to enforce your will on them. You'll be free to explore your options elsewhere, in directions away from the Republic -- and you'll be better funded to be able to do it.

This is a one-time offer, made only on this channel and directed to the Mandalorian representative on Zongorlu for delivery to his or her superiors. It will not be repeated or acknowledged in the future; if rejected, it will not be part of any official history. We'll return to as it was, with the Republic readying to run you out -- and with Captain Goodvalor's words preparing the way. Me, talking to you -- every day, on every frequency we can find to reach you, until one of us capitulates.

The choice is yours. Consider it well. We await your response.

The Republic. Square deals for one and all.

* * *

Yes, Cassus, I responded already. I used the transmitter here on Zongorlu.

I know I should have waited. Who is Koblus Sornell, anyway? Just a warrior. A signals expert, but a warrior. A Mandalorian warrior...

... and as a Mandalorian warrior, their "choice" was really no choice at all. I spoke for all of us: Their "bargain" was ridiculous.

Think about it: They could have a glorious battle, a true measure of what we're worth. That's a bargain. Instead, they're trying to choose -- a bribe? To buy peace like a peasant at a shop? All it costs is whatever guts they ever had.

And they thought we might agree to it! Whatever gave them that idea?

Just like with this "Captain Goodvalor" business. Pretending to be the victor of great battles -- that's insulting enough all on its own. But big talk about what they can do, how big their forces are? Lies about people leaving our side? Did they really think any true Mandalorian would listen?

Do they really fear us so little?

They'll find out. Whatever kind of enemies the Republic is used to, they'll find out we're something different.

I don't understand them. And I don't think they understand us.